

OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD
Washington 25, D. C.

February 8, 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD

SUBJECT: The Wells Plan

1. The attached report was prepared, as of February 1, 1954, by the OCB Working Group on NSC 174. The Board Assistants considered it at their meeting on February 5 and, with certain revisions, accepted it for transmittal to the Board.

2. Attention is invited to paragraph 7 of the report which suggests one possibility for using our surplus food position with friendly countries, particularly those on the periphery of the Iron Curtain. FOA has been working on several possibilities in this regard.

Elmer B. Staats
Elmer B. Staats
Executive Officer

1 Incl.
Rpt of OCB Working Gp
on the Wells Plan, dtd 2/1/54

NSC review(s) completed.

OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD
Washington 25, D. C.

February 1, 1954

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE WELLS PLAN

The Working Group has given careful consideration to the Wells Plan and concludes that at the present time it is (a) impractical to accomplish and (b) politically inadvisable, for the following reasons:

1. With the exception of West Berlin, the areas of the Soviet bloc countries bordering on the Free World are so heavily guarded that they are not susceptible of penetration by the Communist-dominated populations acting en masse. While the exact nature of the controls and barriers may vary, a typical border area consists of a wide cleared zone guarded by barbed wire, control posts, machine guns, mines, rockets and dogs. If a concerted effort were made by the enslaved people to penetrate the border areas, these already considerable controls presumably would be greatly increased. Moreover, the border areas are rural, for the most part, and only a limited percentage of the population would be affected by the plan.

2. We have no evidence that there has been a weakening of police type controls in the Soviet bloc countries sufficient to permit the type of open defiance of the state by the population envisaged by the Wells Plan.

3. With the exception again of West Berlin, all food stations would have to be established in countries not controlled by the United States, and would require the consent of the governments of these countries. In view of their proximity to the Soviet threat, it is not probable that we could obtain the consent of these governments to a program which would be considered by them as extremely provocative to the Communist governments. Only a limited part of the Soviet bloc has common frontiers with non-Communist countries.

4. We have no evidence that sufficiently serious starvation conditions exist in the Soviet bloc area which would impel the people to risk their personal security to obtain the wheat parcels.

5. In the unlikely event that some means were found to enable Curtain country citizens to cross the border for this purpose, their personal security would be in serious jeopardy if they desired to return. We should therefore run the risk of the premature loss of the most anti-Soviet segment of the population.

6. If, on the other hand, Curtain country citizens succeeded in crossing the border in any numbers and chose to remain in free areas, the problem of resettling such people would present serious difficulties.

7. There would likely be unfavorable reaction of friendly countries who feel that they should be given surpluses for their needy. All the countries along the Iron Curtain periphery (Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, South Korea), except possibly West Germany and Austria, themselves suffer from a very low standard of living. We feel that, in the absence of any feasible program for disposal of surpluses behind the Iron Curtain, efforts should be directed toward undertaking larger programs than those currently in operation in border areas as well as other Free World areas where need exists. Plans for disposal of surpluses in areas of need around the world have been prepared by the Administration and are now under consideration by the Congress.

8. The plan also appears to have some serious political disadvantages for the United States. Against the background of the so-called "new look" in Soviet diplomacy which has persuaded many people in the West that the Soviet Government has become more reasonable since Stalin's death and that there is at present an opportunity for a lessening of East-West tensions, the plan would be liable to criticism and misunderstanding, particularly in Western Europe.

9. The Wells Plan touches upon the basic policy questions of East-West trade in non-strategic items which are now under study at the highest governmental level.

10. It would be necessary, in connection with the national promotion campaign, to explain to the public the objectives of the program and the manner in which it would be carried out. This is standard practice in any legitimate and well organized campaign seeking voluntary contributions. Thus, it would be almost impossible to avoid public controversy on its desirability and possible consequences. The Soviets would certainly attempt to make an international issue out of it shortly after the national promotion campaign got underway.

11. Adequate facilities for mass packaging of surplus foods in the volume contemplated by the Wells Plan are not readily available. FOA's experience in operating the Christmas West project revealed that the largest available facilities in the East of this type are located around Philadelphia, and that in processing 3 million packages of total value of \$13,656,000, these facilities were tied up for some time. No doubt other facilities could be made available but they would be scattered around the country and, in total, would probably not increase capacity more than two or three times that existing around the Philadelphia area.

12. While it is proposed that this plan be carried out under voluntary auspices, it would be most difficult to keep the government from becoming identified with it.

13. In summary, therefore, there appears substantial risk that the net effect of the attempt to carry through such a plan would involve serious loss by the United States of its political and propaganda position in relation to the Soviet bloc with very little prospect that the plan would be successful.


Edward M. O'Connor

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Operations Coordinating Board (via)

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